

TESTIMONY: Assembly Bill 96 - Rep. Martin Schmedes
Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Chairperson: Sen. Mark Miller
Public Hearing: Thursday, February 7, 2008
Room 201 Southeast

Mr. Chairperson and members of
the Committee on Environment and
Natural Resources, I thank you for the
opportunity to speak with you today
regarding Assembly Bill 96.

Protecting Wisconsin's most precious
natural resources is an essential duty
of our government. Assembly Bill 96

will aid in this duty by prohibiting possession of, controlling, releasing, storing, selling, or transporting fish of an invasive species. One of the most pressing invasive species, in my opinion, is the Asian carp, which must be differentiated from the Common carp as they are two separate species that have very different effects on the balance of our aquatic ecosystem. A

couple of years ago I attended the Council of State Governments' Midwestern Conference annual meeting in Milwaukee where I learned of the danger that this species poses to our waterways. At the time, it was my understanding that the fish had reached as far north as Chicago, Illinois, on the Illinois River. The Illinois Department of Natural

Resources was struggling valiantly to keep the fish from entering the Great Lakes. At the meeting, it was also stated that this fish had become 95 percent of the biomass in parts of the Mississippi River basin. It is believed that the fish entered the general environment during an incident in the 1990s when floodwaters on the Mississippi River, in the State of

Mississippi, invaded aquaculture farms in that state and released this fish into the general environment.

According to a columnist Eric Sharp of the Detroit Free Press, multiple species of Asian carp have threatening implications to lakes for many different reasons. Adult Asian carp range in size from 50 to 120 pounds. Their ravenous appetites

spur this enormous growth as Asian carp eat two to three times their body weight each day. They breed so fast that Australians have nicknamed the fish “river rabbits”. In addition to their large size, Asian carp also jump like tarpon. On many occasions, the Silver carp have jumped out of the water onto tour barges, research boats, and private fishing boats.

The Silver carp, which can reach 60 pounds, and the Bighead carp, which can top 100 pounds, are two species arousing great concern in the Mississippi and Illinois River systems. More recently, the carp species was found in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal only 11 miles below Lake Michigan. In 1990, biologists netted no Asian carp when

they sampled the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. Astonishingly enough, only ten years later Asian carp made up 97 percent of a massive fish kill in a Mississippi slough just south of St. Louis. Bob Kavetsky, a Great Lakes biologist, states “both the Bighead and Silver carp feed on plankton, but the Silver carp is a major filter feeder, just like a vacuum cleaner, and the

question arises whether the plankton is concentrated enough in the Great Lakes to support large populations of these fish.” Therefore, it is also the fear that if the carp reach the Great Lakes, they will place an insurmountable stress on the plankton population, resulting in more competition not only with juvenile game fish but also with all the baitfish

and fingerlings near the bottom of the food chain. This would in turn lead to adverse effects throughout the ecosystem. In the 1980s, Zebra mussels arrived by ship from Europe. These tenacious mussels caused dramatic changes in the Great Lakes plant and fish supplies. Moreover, biologists believe that the environmental changes these Zebra

mussels caused will pale in comparison to the potentially devastating effects of the Asian carp.

The Bighead carp, which were netted in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal in 2001 near Lake Michigan, prompt some biologists to conclude that it is too late to keep them out of the Great Lakes.

Scientists, however, do not see the

Common and Grass carp, as immediate threats. This is because they are sustained on a different food source, rooted plants that are in short supply in big waters. Scientists predict that this fact will prevent these species from becoming too populous. Conversely, it cannot be denied that species such as the Bighead carp, Silver carp, and Black carp are

immediate threats to the biological existence of the Great Lakes. These threats can be further illustrated by the damage done to the Wisconsin's ecosystem by the Asian Carp, which have already infested Wisconsin's rivers and smaller lakes. Biologists fear the damage to these regions will be nearly irreversible before the decade comes to an end.

Assembly Speaker Michael

Huebsch has brought it to my attention that the Asian carp has infested the waters as far north as Lake Onalaska, thus showing the rapid migration of these fish and the need to act swiftly. The Minnesota DNR is gravely concerned about the impact that the fish will have on their 10,000 lakes, and Wisconsin needs to

be concerned about the threats posed to our own 15,000 lakes and rivers by the Asian Carp and all invasive fish species.

In closing, we must work together to ensure our lakes and rivers continue to thrive for generations to come. Assembly Bill 96 will help solidify this goal by preserving the

delicate balance of our marine regions.

I also would like to note that since this bill was originally drafted, it has come to my attention that there are over two-thousand registered fish farms in Wisconsin and a general exemption allowing the handling of invasive fish species at those facilities would be extremely risky. Therefore,

I am recommending the deletion of Section 1 (3) (d), the exemption for fish farms, because a better time to address the needs and concerns of fish farmers is during the rule-making process when the list of invasive species is promulgated.

Thank you once again for your time and attention regarding this pressing matter.

